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WILLIAM MORRIS

Seventeen years have passed since the death of William Morris, and during this brief time the fame of that amazing Englishman has undergone varying fortunes. For several years after his death the flood of books, pamphlets, and articles on the man himself, his poetry, and his craftsmanship was almost, if not quite, abnormal. Then, slowly but surely came a revulsion. The interest lessened, until it seemed all but dead; and five or six years ago the surest of all marks of being numbered amongst the 'intellectuals' was to dismiss Morris with a sneer. His poetry—'puff!'—mere thistledown, to be sent spinning into the abyss by the lightest of critical breaths. His craftsmanship—another puff!—and now we have disposed of the man, and may turn our attention to the newest psychological word-spinner, or the latest painter attempting to woo the public's favor by "flinging a paintpot in its face."

But in 1908 there came the earliest sign of a renaissance—the small biography by Alfred Noyes, published in Macmillan's *English Men of Letters* series. It is difficult to say whether Mr. Noyes's book was, to some extent, the inspiration of the renaissance; or whether it was merely the precocious blossom, put forth while its fellows, still snugly curled up in the bud, are slowly maturing and awaiting the coming of better weather. The book had many faults. As a biography, it was hopelessly ill-balanced and ineffectual. The craftsmanship, which occupied the greater part of Morris's working life, was dismissed in a few paragraphs; and soon Morris himself slipped away out of sight;

while Mr. Noyes, going merrily on his way, filled his pages with criticism of the poetry and romances. Nor was Mr. Noyes's criticism flawless enough to atone for his other sins. Often it was illuminating and provocative of thought; but it was heady, hasty, immature, and as a whole, sadly inconclusive. Its author would seem to have forgotten that the condition of mind essential to a poet is the condition of mind fatal to the poet turned critic. But one merit the book had—there was enthusiasm in every page of it; and it may well be that the enthusiasm of Mr. Noyes served to rekindle or awaken enthusiasm in other people.

Now the renaissance is upon us. During 1912 two books on Morris were published in London—*William Morris*, by the Countess of Warwick (T. E. and C. E. Jack), and *William Morris*, by John Drinkwater (Martin Secker). And lastly—though perhaps this should stand first—1912 saw the appearance of the first moiety of the *Collected Works* of Morris, published by Longmans in twenty-four volumes, and edited by Miss May Morris. Naturally, these publications have called forth a great number of reviews and articles; and cheap reprints of Morris are beginning to appear freely—one of the most notable, an edition of Professor Mackail's *Life* at four shillings.

Of the new books, the Countess of Warwick's may be touched on briefly. It is a popular biography, illustrated with drawings of the homes and haunts of Morris, and with the inevitable portrait as frontispiece. There is nothing new in the book, its matter being taken from Mackail's biography, *The Memoirs of Burne-Jones*, and other sources similar to these; and it is the work of an amateur. But it should serve the purpose of sending new readers to Morris and Mackail; and this, doubtless, was the mission its gracious and charming authoress meant it to fulfil.

Mr. Drinkwater's volume is "a horse of another color." Except for a biographical introduction, and a slight thread of narrative sufficient to link one poetical period to another, Mr. Drinkwater confines himself to criticism of Morris's poetry and prose. His book was needed, and it is more than welcome. Mr. Noyes's criticism reminds one of the white-heat and effervescence of a firework display; but in Mr. Drinkwater's we have

something more nearly akin to fire and light in a fairy palace, adding a magic to the magic of the furniture and draperies and shining vessels. One may not always agree with its writer—but is there any critic one always agrees with? Personally, I feel that Mr. Drinkwater inclines to overrate the importance of a poem here and there; and certainly he is wanting in a due sense of proportion, when, in his summing-up, he elevates Morris, as a poet, to the plane of Homer and Dante and Shakespeare. But perhaps, in this case, a certain amount of exaggeration (quite honest on Mr. Drinkwater's part) is all to the good; as it was when Lamb took up the cudgels on behalf of the neglected Elizabethan dramatists. Take it all in all, this book is one to be reckoned with. Indeed, one is almost tempted to say that, to the two outstanding works on Morris—Mackail's *Life* for the man, and Aymer Vallance's volume for his craftsmanship—Mr. Drinkwater's must be added as a third, for criticism of the poetry.¹

Then, as to the *Collected Works*, the set is not quite complete at the time of writing; but the volumes which are to hand call for little save praise. Their get-up is tasteful—the covers of blue boards and canvas, and the print fair and comely. The two flaws noticeable are, one fears, of a nature to have moved Morris to unprintable language; the labels on the backs are badly pasted on, and over-inked letters are a deal too frequent in the type. For the rest, there is Morris—and Miss May Morris; and the publisher's choice of editress was an inspiration. Miss Morris, with an admirable sense of fitness, leaves criticism to other people; for the most part contenting herself, in her introductions, with biographical touches—chiefly personal memories—which show us the poet as he was, and tell us what he was saying and doing at the time when a particular poem or romance was written. This service done, Miss Morris steps aside; and we are left to enjoy our poet with an added zest; for the relationship of her delicate and graceful prose to the matter which comes after it is very much that of the prelude to a song.

¹ Since this article was written, two new books on Morris have been published: *William Morris: A Study in Personality*, by A. Compton-Rickett 1913; *William Morris: His Work and Influence*, by A. Clutton Brock, 1914

From these new books, together with the mass of facts and comment already grown up around Morris and his work; from the evidence of his work itself, and from the further evidence of its influence upon the crafts and manufactures of to-day; one fact emerges with the utmost clearness: William Morris is to be counted among the giants of his century. His ultimate greatness is a matter for the future to decide; but already, in these swiftly moving times, we of the younger generation are far enough removed from him to attempt a tentative estimate. Most of his critics, indeed, while expressly repudiating any such intention, have essayed the task; but, one and all, they have appraised him solely or chiefly as a poet. One might just as well sit in judgment on a city after looking round its townhall, or criticise America from an acquaintance with the State of Washington. In this article I shall therefore try to arrive at some conclusion as to the importance of Morris, not from the merits of one branch of his art, but from a consideration of his work as a whole.

It is questionable whether any period in the recorded history of the world was more prodigal of intellect than the nineteenth century. The throng of the talented and capable who were born and died in it is amazing; and although a group of men and women of genius tower high above their fellows, to give place of precedence to one or a few of this smaller company is a matter of the greatest difficulty. Their numbers were considerable, and the nature of their achievements is bewildering in its diversity. But if priority is to be given, I shall venture to assert that two men stand out above the rest as of highest importance for their contributions to the thought and art of the century: the first, Charles Darwin, and the second William Morris. Few will dispute the preëminence of Darwin, but probably many that of Morris. To put forward a claim of this nature and leave the contention unsupported by facts, is the easiest course, and perhaps, for its author, the most satisfactory; but I shall try to establish the truth of my thesis; and if I fail, the field will remain open to the more gifted and better equipped.

Generally, the life of a man of genius is devoted to one or two branches of science, art, or philosophy; and criticism of his

work is comparatively simple. Morris is abnormal. His activity was prodigious, and the fields in which he worked were various and divergent. To survey what he did, to take the measure of his success, and to estimate the importance of his influence upon his generation;—this is a task that, on a smaller scale, is almost as bewildering as Herbert Spencer's endeavor to systematize the universe. Roughly, his activities may be summed up under the three headings of poetry, social reform, and craftsmanship. I have purposely placed the three sections in the order in which they stand; since to the mass of his admirers in the present day such would seem to be the order of their importance. For a score of those who know Morris as a poet, it is doubtful if three are to be found with more than the haziest of notions that he was something more. To the growing multitude who are interested in the labor and socialist movements his name is one to conjure with; but chiefly—and in many cases solely—because of his socialism. His craftsmanship is, both literally and metaphorically, the possession of the few; and in artistic circles its importance is by no means undisputed. It once happened that a painter, of great accomplishment and no small leaven of genius, found occasion to call on Morris at Kelmscott House; and his comment on the decoration he found there is a fair expression of the attitude of a considerable school towards the art of Morris: "Very fine! Very fine! Only the carpet was on the ceiling, and he had the kitchen dresser in the drawing-room!" In the opinion of this school, the work of Morris is archaic, exaggerated, and entirely wanting in delicacy and refinement.

For the purposes of arriving at some conclusion as to their relative importance, I shall briefly examine the three aspects of Morris.

First, his poetry. There are few poets I read with equal pleasure; and I have read and re-read many of his poems until I can repeat them from memory. I have yet to discover a modern war-song to match *The Burghers' Battle*; and I am convinced that the *Defence of Guenevere* poems, marred as they are by most of the possible flaws and crudities, constitute a nobler and worthier piece of art than *The Idylls of the King*, with all their magnificent waste of eloquence and artistry. If

one's sole acquaintance with the poetry of Morris were the motto for the *Flowering Orchard* embroidery,—

Lo silken my garden, and silken my sky,
And silken my apple-boughs hanging on high;
All wrought by the Worm in the peasant-carle's cot
On the Mulberry leafage when summer was hot!—

those four lines alone would furnish conclusive evidence that their composer was a copious writer of very fine verse. None the less, I decline to allow my admiration for Morris's poetry to rob me of my sanity. An examination of his verses will yield abundant examples of the effects in which he was at his best; a fact which Mr. Noyes has realized, and stated, and reiterated. The poetry of William Morris is to be considered and criticized purely as *poetic tapestry*; for wherever he scores most forcibly, there invariably his verse is most suggestive of the aims and methods of tapestry. A few lines from the conclusion of *Love is Enough* will serve by way of illustration:—

The pathway green
And rose-hung walls of ancient grey
Yet warm with sunshine gone away.
Yea full fain would I rest thereby,
And watch the flickering martins fly
About the long eave-bottles red
And the clouds lessening overhead:
E'en now meseems the cows are come
Unto the grey gates of our home,
And low to hear the milking-pail:
The peacock spreads abroad his tail
Against the sun, as down the lane
The milkmaids pass the moveless wain,
And stable door, where the roan team
An hour ago began to dream
Over the dusty oats.

Sometimes, as in this passage, the imagery and details are homely; often, in *The Earthly Paradise*, they are of an exotic richness; but in these tapestry-passages alone is the essential poetry of Morris to be found. For present purposes, the *Defence of Guenevere* lyrics and ballads may be ignored. Mr. Drinkwater to the contrary, they are the experiments and exercises of a man not yet come into his kingdom; bearing much the same relationship to the poetry of *The Earthly Paradise*

as Rossetti's early but delightful picture, *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, to to the *Lady Lilith* and *Dante's Dream* of his maturity.

A few excellent hortatory passages occur in the later poems. What could be more admirably suited to its theme than the grave, sweet simplicity of—

Ah, it may be! Oft meseemeth, in the days that yet shall be,
When no slave of gold abideth 'twixt the breadth of sea to sea,

Oft, when men and maids are merry, ere the sunlight leaves the earth,
And they bless the day beloved, all too short for all their mirth,

Some shall pause awhile and ponder on the bitter days of old,
Ere the toil of strife and battle overthrew the curse of gold;

Then 'twixt lips of loved and lover solemn thoughts of us shall rise;
We who once were fools defeated, then shall be the brave and wise.

There amid the world new-built shall our earthly deeds abide,
Though our names be all forgotten, and the tale of how we died?

But only too often gems such as this are disfigured by a setting of crude or prosy passages; and sometimes they blossom out of turgid denunciations which have much in common with the rant of the street-corner tub-thumper.

Turning elsewhere, we find that *The Life and Death of Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise* are tapestry from beginning to end. The perfections of such lyrics as *A Garden by the Sea* are the perfections of "silken embroidery"; and although *The Burghers' Battle* teems with vigor and motion, it is the vigor and motion of a spirited tapestry battle-piece. And if it be objected that *Sigurd the Volsung* is architecture rather than tapestry, I shall reply that if it were so, exceptions prove rules; but that *Sigurd the Volsung* has a disconcerting knack of reaching its best in the passages which are most tapestry-like.

After their kind, these poems are as pleasing as the formal and labored masterpieces of Tennyson. Indeed, if—as in these days some maintain—the pleasure derivable from a piece of art is in direct ratio to the pleasure of the artist in creating it, then the poems of Morris are more praiseworthy than those of Tennyson. In them there is no evidence of perpetual self-questioning and self-preparation, or of morbid and incessant worry concerning what the public said or might say. Morris wrote primarily for his own pleasure; and, on the whole, was

remarkably indifferent to criticism. But to pretend that his poetry is as great as Tennyson's seems to me little less than foolishness. To assert, with Bernard Shaw, that "Morris wrote some of the greatest poetry of the nineteenth century," is no difficult matter; but neither the bare assertion of Mr. Shaw nor the quotations of Mr. Drinkwater will avail to prove it. Morris himself would, I think, have been the first to disparage so flamboyant a presumption. Moreover, many of his aims were also the aims of his contemporaries; and not infrequently his favorite effects were achieved by others with greater power and beauty. *The King's Daughter* of Swinburne might be from the pen of Morris, if it were not characterized by a strength, a richness of color, and a quality of uncanny loveliness beyond his reach. Rossetti's *Blessed Damosel* was a ballad he would have gloried in making; so also was Tennyson's *Ænone* or his *Lotus-Eaters*; but it was the fortune of Rossetti and Tennyson to conceive them.

His prose may be touched on more briefly; for it is inevitable that the prose of a man who has written effective verse should be regarded as a pendant to his poetry. Half a dozen of the volumes which stand to his credit may be left out of the consideration; since, being devoted to the theory and practice of the arts and crafts, they belong rather to his craftsmanship than to his contribution to literature. Of the books which remain—his romances, a dozen or so in all—two have attained a wide circulation. They are still very much alive, and there seems a strong probability that they will long continue so. It is scarcely necessary to state that the romances in question are *News from Nowhere* and *A Dream of John Ball*; or to add that, of its kind, each is a masterpiece.

It may be that "the manufacture of Utopias grows wearisome"; but, if so, the fault is in the authors, not in their theme. To mortals afflicted with life as it is, there is no other subject of such sheer fascination as an adequate picture of life as it might be. And of all modern conceptions of a perfected civilization which are to be compared with *News from Nowhere*, Bellamy's *Looking Backward* is little more than a dry-as-dust exhibition of perfected machinery and organization; and Blatchford's

Sorcery Shop a variation of *News from Nowhere* without the architecture. Mr. Wells's *Modern Utopia* smacks of the "human-interest" popular magazine; and Edward Carpenter's *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure*, is but a sketch. To match the attempt of Morris, one must go back to Tudor England or to Greece of two thousand years ago—to More's *Utopia* or Plato's *Republic*.

And as an idealized realization of mediæval England, what is to be set beside *A Dream of John Ball*? What could be more vivid or in its own way more perfect than the description of the church towards the close?—

In a flash I saw it all—the east crimson with sunrise through the white window on my right hand; the richly-carved stalls and gilded screen-work; the pictures on the walls, the loveliness of the faultless colour of the mosaic window lights, the altar and the red light over it looking strange in the daylight, and the biers with the hidden dead men upon them that lay before the high altar. A great pain filled my heart at the sight of all that beauty, and withal I heard quick steps coming up the paved church-path to the porch, and the loud whistle of a sweet old-time tune therewith; then the footsteps stopped at the door; I heard the latch rattle, and knew that Will Green's hand was on the ring of it.

Merely the interior of one of the village churches scattered throughout the length and breadth of England—with a difference. The mingling of veracity and imaginative insight in the description is admirable, and the effect is heightened by a sense of romance and a touch of the weird. The result exquisite. Perhaps even finer are the chapters which deal with the preaching of John Ball at the village cross, precisely similar in style and treatment; but they are much too long for quotation. Unfortunately, like *News from Nowhere*, the book was written while Morris was dabbling with journalism; and here and there a scrap of nineteenth-century 'journalese' intrudes itself in the thick of his rich, mellow word-painting, with the effect of a patch of linoleum showing through a hole in a fine Persian carpet. But there is only one thing to be said of the tiny volume—that in English literature it is unique.

The rest of the romances may be tersely, if partially, criticised by the three words,—Who reads them? They abound in passages of great picturesqueness, beauty, and charm; and as a demonstration of the capabilities of pure Anglo-Saxon are only rivalled by the novels and essays of Robert Blatchford. But, however delightful they may be to the Morris-lover, to the ordinary reader they are only too apt to appear dehumanized, rather pointless, and without beginning or end. They are, and will always be, books of very limited appeal; and one of the few mistakes of Morris was the form in which they are cast. Finding that the thirteenth century was six hundred years ahead of the nineteenth in architecture and decorative art, he appears to have jumped to the conclusion that its literature was equally superior; whereas the nineteenth century was incomparably richer in poetry than the thirteenth, and in the art of telling stories was nearly six hundred years ahead of it. In addition to this, there is evidence in his letters that he scarcely took these romances seriously: they were written for his own pleasure, and so long as they enthralled him he cared little whether the world was pleased or bored.

The conclusion of this brief inquiry is, that the achievement of Morris, in poetry and prose, would have counted as remarkable for any other man, and alone would have served to win him a lasting reputation; but that his poetry and prose alone would never have established his right to the "place in the sun" he appears to me to have won for himself.

Next, Morris as a social reformer. Here again, as in most of his activities, his influence upon contemporary life and thought was considerable. Whether socialism is a good or a bad thing is no concern of this article; it is a matter of opinion. In the judgment of a section of society by no means inconsiderable, literature and art are mere futilities which hinder the progress of serious work, or puerilities that serve no better purpose than the amusement of the idle and childish. I shall merely consider the influence of Morris upon the socialist movement, and leave open the question whether it was an influence which made for good or for evil.

It goes without saying that at a time when socialism was al-

most entirely an affair of the working classes, and had scarcely begun to invade the more imposing circles of literature and art, one of the finest conceivable advertisements for the cause was the championship of so picturesque a figure as Morris. This cultured and moneyed genius, himself a man of business and an employer of labor, was to be seen preaching the new gospel at street-corners, engaging in the rough-and-tumble of fights for free speech in Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square, and tramping through the mud of the November streets at the head of a handful of unemployed to demand work of the local Board of Guardians. The spectacle was an incitement to thought in others of his class. His writings, too, invaded a stratum of society then practically untouched. *News from Nowhere* and *A Dream of John Ball* were read and discussed by many who would have remained oblivious to the appeals of *Justice* and *The Clarion*. Moreover, one of the most frequent reproaches levelled against socialism was its utilitarianism. Its sole aim—in the opinion of its detractors—was to fill stomachs and clothe backs; ignoring or discouraging the claims of souls and brains. But here was a man, comparatively indifferent to hunger and rags and the thousand-and-one physical miseries incident to poverty, converted to socialism because he saw that the vast mass of humanity were born to ugly surroundings and a hopeless incapacity to appreciate such of the beauties of nature and art as came within their reach. The working folk of the Middle Ages made ballads and fairy-tales and built the churches and cathedrals; but the nineteenth-century proletariat had lost its sense of beauty, and instinctively preferred the ugly and tawdry, the sickly-sentimental and the base. The burden of his writings, prose and poetry, which touch upon the social question, is invariably,—

This land we have loved in our love and our leisure
 For them hangs in heaven, high out of their reach;
 The wide hills o'er the sea-plain for them have no pleasure,
 The grey homes of their fathers no story to teach.

The singers have sung and the builders have builded,
 The painters have fashioned their tales of delight;
 For what and for whom hath the world's book been gilded,
 When all is for these but the blackness of night?

These facts noted, it must not be forgotten that the period of his active work as a socialist was brief—no longer than seven years in total. During those years he was obsessed by a belief in the imminence of an uprising, which would at once result in the establishment of a system of communism, after the fashion of the revolution in *News from Nowhere*. In the phrase of the scornful, he “lived in a fool’s paradise of his own.” Presently came disillusionment, and the realization that socialism, if it ever came, could only come after a lengthy period of agitation and education, as the result of a long and painfully gradual social evolution. Then it ceased to be his consuming passion; and, although he lost neither faith nor belief, he lost heart. To the close of his life he remained a socialist; but after those seven years, his contributions to the movement were confined to monetary assistance and a milder and more chastened preaching of the gospel through the medium of his books and art. The Kelmscott Press and the affairs of Morris & Co. took the place of the business of the Socialist League.

For these—and other—reasons, I think it may be claimed that, while his services to socialism were great and memorable, their contribution to the aggregate of his influence upon his generation was much smaller than that of his poetry and prose, considered purely as poetry and prose.

Lastly, Morris as a craftsman. The other day, in glancing round a druggist’s shop, I noticed a number of articles with decoration that was either petty or displeasing; but scattered here and there amongst these, I came upon goods decked out in labels and wrappers which pleased me mightily. There were a series of perfume-bottles, with labels in strong curves and interweaving lines, their tiny panels and bold angles filled in with flowers. The color-scheme was rich violet, turquoise, gold, emerald, and orange merging into scarlet—a combination suggestive of old stained glass. Next, I was attracted by a soap-carton patterned in bold chainwork—red, blue, green, and gold; the top crossed by a scroll of Gothic lettering, presided over by a griffin with gaping jaws. Then I picked up a photograph-album, with a cover of blue-grey hand-made paper and blocked-in design. Neither love nor money could have

purchased such a book a few years ago, and this was priced at eighteen-pence.

I saw other labels and packages that were both tasteful and effective; but a description of them would scarcely please the reader so greatly as their designs pleased me. When I leave the house here I come face to face with a red-brick convent, modified fourteenth-century in style, with graceful windows, traceries, and battlements, and a line of fantastic gargoyles grinning on its courtyard. In the shop-windows, I see furniture and fabrics which are right and pleasing, at prices no higher than those charged for the banalities which disfigure the rooms of the average small house. When I open a magazine or newspaper, it does not surprise me to find advertisements with Gothic borders and lettering, and a profuse recognition of the value of flowers and foliage in decorative work. Two volumes of Browning lie before me as I write, each running into more than six hundred pages of good print. Their front-pages of interweaving stems and flowers would almost have satisfied the fastidious taste of Morris himself; and they are published at a shilling each. What do these things signify? Revolution—no less.

Consider the condition of decorative art fifty years ago. Probably it was then at a lower level than at any other period in the history of any civilization. Four hundred years of degeneration had culminated in the work of the Georgian period, "praiseworthy solely for its negative virtues." The nineteenth century, realizing that matters could be no worse, gave up the whole business and resigned itself to a period of science and applied ugliness, relieved by the two arts of literature and painting easel pictures. A few leaves were still scraped round the capitals of a porch, and a bulge or two moulded on fire-irons and chipped on table-legs; but these embellishments were added with no idea of beautifying the home and its furniture. They were purely a survival from preceding centuries, almost as instinctive as the custom of the dog, who, after ages of domestication, still takes several turns round his kennel before settling down to sleep, in imitation of his ancestor the fox or wolf, exploring his lair each night to assure himself that it was clear of snakes and vermin.

That a revolution has come about few will deny: the evi-

dences are too unmistakable. But concerning the prime cause of this revolution, opinion will scarcely be so unanimous. "The time-spirit," some will say; others, "John Ruskin." I shall reply, "Neither—*William Morris*." Let me give reasons for this assertion, and slightly modify it. Far be it from me to deny the share in the renaissance of a score of craftsmen famous and unknown; though of these Morris was the first in the field and afterwards the chief inspiration. Even less would I ignore the claims of Ruskin, Pugin, and their allies and camp-followers. John Ruskin stands as the protagonist of modern art philosophy; just as Morris sums up in himself the achievements of practical craftsmanship. And Morris was, by his own confession, merely a disciple of Ruskin, reducing the theories of his master to practice.

Ruskin, in spite of his wordiness, has left prose which will live if anything at all lives from the nineteenth century; and in spite of his childish mistakes and foibles his theories have affected art more profoundly than anything written or said for three centuries before them. On the surface, then, it would appear that the lion's share in the revolution must be given, not to Morris, but to Ruskin. Yet a deeper survey of the question reverses the positions.

The history of most important revolutions is very similar. After a period of blind groping and questioning of spirit among the poetically-minded, various feeble and tentative evidences of the new thought become visible in the arts. Then, when the time-spirit has made his advent possible, a genius arises combining within himself the special gifts of poet and philosopher. The theories of the new philosophy are formulated, incompletely and rather chaotically as a rule, for kinetic genius is seldom to be weighed in a balance or measured with a foot-rule. Plato, Newton, Darwin, and Ruskin may be instanced as geniuses of this type. When the time is ripe for him, the philosopher is seldom wanting; and in the case of Ruskin many voices were crying in the wilderness, and circumstances had combined to make smooth the way for a philosopher of natural art. The return to nature-poetry of Collins, Gray, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Tennyson was a matter of history; and in art circles there was a considerable fermentative unrest and discontent with

existing ideals. But when the philosopher has come and has forced his message upon an unwilling world, what is the usual outcome of his preaching? Recognition of its truth and utility by a few, to whom it becomes a life-inspiration; but to the many his doctrines are pilloried absurdities—fair game and safe game for the musty eggs and mud of their bitterest irony and scorn. So that, to a fiery spirit, progress degenerates into a subject for despair; and to the philosophical at times is driven home that cynical thrust of Goethe's:—

'Tis little matter what is taught, men will,
Taught or untaught, go on the same way still.

Two thousand years ago a scheme of Utopia was outlined by Plato which, in many of its aspects, seems eminently sane and practical even now. Social revolutions are naturally slower in development than revolutions in art; but to-day, after two thousand years, with an infinity of caution and questioning of soul, the world is beginning to take the first steps along the road which leads to Utopia. I know of only one parallel to this immediate reduction to practice of Ruskin's theories—the preaching of Rousseau and the French Revolution. The French Revolution failed to regenerate society and establish the millennium; but it curbed the tyranny of kingly and official Europe and opened the way to those social and political changes which characterize the nineteenth century; and its leaven is still actively and healthily at work. The revolution instigated by Ruskin is equally tentative and incomplete; but the sum total of its accomplished results is amazing. Nor has its impulse in any way abated; on the contrary, it is continually gaining in force and becoming more and more widely diffused. Fifty years ago a man of taste went perforce to the dealer in antiques for his furniture and upholstery; now he gets them made by a craftsman. And, most notable of all testimonies to its well-being, men of business who are acute and far-sighted have discovered that the business methods of the fifties no longer pay. There is now more money in originality and beauty than in the commonplace and conventional.

I have already suggested the prodigious difficulties which had to be overcome; and they are sufficiently obvious. Not only

was a new applied art to be created when applied art was dead ; but the form of this art necessitated the challenging and annihilation of the traditions of four centuries. The caricaturing of Greece and Rome, which had inspired the last flickers of craftsmanship in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was to be swept aside and give place to a deification of the despised Gothic. Mechanical and commercial mid-Victorianism was to be convulsed with a cataclysm which would seem to have called for the interposition of a miracle. It did ; and the miracle occurred, and the name of the miracle was William Morris.

An impossible man ; but less a man than the embodiment of one of those world-forces which from time to time throughout history thrust back destiny and reshape society ; a man who lays down the pen of the poet to stiffen his fingers in the dye-vats and curl himself up for ten hours a day over the warp of the tapestry loom ; a man who composes and writes *The Earthly Paradise* in a compartment of the old Underground Railway ; a man who paints tiles and ceilings, embroiders, 'points,' cuts wood-blocks, plans gardens, and turns out a thousand designs for wallpapers, chintzes, tapestries, title-pages and book-margins. He philosophizes, fishes, writes and stage-manages a play and acts in it ; he shares the work of half a dozen societies, and takes part in the mêlée of "Bloody Sunday" in Trafalgar Square. He is equally at home in lecturing a learned society, the Oxford undergraduates, or "a colleague, a small boy, and a policeman" at a street-corner. A man who contrives to be everywhere, to see everything, and to find time for everything ; endowed with the working capacity of a dozen men, and the generalship of a thousand. One by one he resuscitates the lost arts ; and no sooner has he mastered one and trained workmen into carrying it out than he is experimenting with another. But the mastered craft is never neglected. The smallest detail of a painted window, of the upholstery of a room, or of the materials, color, and workmanship of a fabric, is his personal care. A flaw, or a hint of faulty color, and the work must be destroyed and re-done, lest it should discredit "the firm."

All who come his way are fired by his enthusiasm. Personalities so self-willed and self-centred as Rossetti and Ford Madox

Brown are enrolled under his banner; Burne-Jones being sympathetic and easily led. Most of the craftsmen of his later period acknowledge his leadership, share his work, and go to him for guidance in their own—Walter Crane, William de Morgan, Emery Walker, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, and many another. His pupils must go to the loom and dye-vats before they are promoted to the more ‘gentlemanly’ pencils and brushes of the designer; and they do it. Lastly—and the factor is by no means of least importance—he is the possessor of £60,000; and by this fortunate accident, power is added to his personality.

And how much his designs must have contributed to the result. Looking through them, one is continually asking, Was this man never tired, or jaded, or at odds with the world and himself? Was he a volcano, to communicate such fire and spirit to every drawing he made? Were there any bounds to his invention, fancy, and ingenuity; or was he, like Nature, recklessly prodigal because his resources were inexhaustible?

His sense of fitness was almost miraculous. He could take a dozen flowers of the most varying types and habits and scatter them over a design until it rivalled the luxuriance of a June meadow, without the slightest jarring or incongruity of one flower with another. He could cover a surface with tiny patches of bold color in apparently careless profusion; yet the whole would blend into a soft mist or fire of quiet magnificence. Compare the “Honeysuckle” chintz, the “Lily-and-Pomegranate” wallpaper, or the “Lily” carpet, with the cleverest designs of his competitors and disciples; and what a world of difference! Or even the scraps of ornament for the Kelmscott Press books, which he would fling into the wastepaper-basket when blocks had been cut from them. One would give all the ‘delicacy’ and ‘refinement’ that has ever afflicted art for a tenth of the qualities which teem in his work.

Like most revolutionaries, he opened his campaign with no definite idea of what he was to accomplish. Ruskin’s theoretical revolution was the outcome of a letter to the *Times* in defence of Turner; Morris’s practical revolution grew out of the necessity of furnishing a house. Throughout his career is everywhere visible that reaction between individual and environment

which to earlier times was predestination, and to the present day is determinism. He went to Oxford purposing to take Holy Orders, but soon his theological development made this impossible; then he apprenticed himself to an architect, and the character of the work disgusted him. Turning artist, in a few years he had convinced himself that he would never paint pictures to his own satisfaction; and just when he was nearing the conclusion that on the whole he was rather useless and helpless, by this accident of building himself a house and the impossibility of furnishing it with contemporary products, he was brought face to face with the work which no man then living could have carried out with equal mastery.

But, although no reformer with a foreseen and logical aim at the regeneration of art, he was—and perhaps this was better—a born rebel. It is said that, as a boy, he was taken to the Great Exhibition, which was accounted by most of his contemporaries the crowning glory of the nineteenth century, and a few minutes after entering the building he flung himself down on a bench and covered his face with his hands. He could go no farther—it was “all so ugly.” The incident is typical of his whole life.

It is probable that his very narrowness was the chief impetus to his extraordinary achievement. One of the most characteristic of his recorded sayings is, “If we don’t like a thing it is bad.” The masters of the Renaissance and after were his favorite butts; and his idolized Chaucer was “the corrupter of the English language” for his pains in enriching the vocabulary from the French and Latin. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were an obsession with Morris; so much so that, as he walked or drove through the country, he was always trying to picture it bridgeless, dark with interminable forests, and grazed by unimproved sheep and cattle. Of course he was wrong, but he was also gloriously right; for if applied art is ever again to become the chief pleasure and preoccupation of the northern races, the form of that art must be, and can only be, a development from the Gothic.

On the whole—with one important exception—the new art is taking the direction he saw to be inevitable. In textiles and printing, Gothic easily leads; also in metal-work and dwelling-

house construction. The one exception of note—the present treatment of large business premises and public buildings—occurs solely through economic considerations. The Renaissance style lends itself admirably to economy of space, large, airy rooms, and the methods of steel construction; but each of these ends is equally possible with the Gothic forms. It should be worth the consideration of those concerned in the ordering and constructing of large buildings, whether a little extra trouble and outlay would not be compensated for by the satisfaction of handing down to the next generation structures that would be far handsomer than the best work to be hoped for from any stirring of the dry bones of Greece and Rome.

“He was more of a paperhanger than a poet,” said a writer in the *Academy* of Morris, a few years ago; the article unsigned, but the style Mr. T. W. H. Crosland’s; and the epigram was a valiant and successful attempt at going one better than the old “poetic-upholsterer” jibe. Recently I saw a paper which was placed on the walls of a room by Morris just thirty-one years ago. Graceful stems curve about it and mark off the whole into small panels, each filled with a single leaf; and the design is starred over with tiny flowers. Thirty-one years of smoke, dust, gas-fumes, the moisture of the English atmosphere, and all the ills a wallpaper is heir to; and to-day, with its color softened to a warm yet subdued glow of olive green, it is lovelier than when its surface was damp from the printing-blocks. “More of a paperhanger than a poet”!—surely no finer praise of Morris was ever penned. I would rather have designed the “Wandle” chintz and the “Marigold” wallpaper, and turned out the “Star of Bethlehem” tapestry and the Kelmscott “Chaucer,” than have written the poetry of Tennyson and Browning, or painted the pictures of Millais, Rossetti, and Watts. *Because* “he was more of a paperhanger than a poet,” I have ventured, in no mood of catchpenny sensationalism, but as the result of reasoned conviction, to couple with the name of Charles Darwin, “the man who gave us a new world,” the name of William Morris, the man who gave us a new art.

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